Group holds gay rights demonstration

By **Teresa Owen-Cooper**
Gazette Telegraph

Judy Jordet and Cath Finney came to Colorado Springs from Oregon to celebrate their love for one another.

Next weekend, Jordet and Finney will seal their love in a "ceremony of commitment," during which they will exchange rings and vows.

But Saturday they joined about 150 gay rights activists demonstrating at the headquarters of Focus on the Family, a conservative Christian group.

"We came out to the event because it seems like such a good idea to reclaim family," said Finney. "We're starting our own family."

Indeed, love and family were the theme Saturday. Carrying posters and wearing buttons, participants — gays, lesbians and heterosexuals — said they wanted to make the public aware that homosexuality isn't a threat to families. Demonstrators said Focus on the Family and other conservative religious groups claim gays threaten the traditional family.

No one from Focus on the Family attended the demonstration to respond to the crowd.

But in a prepared statement, Focus officials accused demonstration leaders of misstating the organization's opinions about homosexuality.

But Focus said public policy must aim to strengthen the traditional family to counter social problems.

"When the only ethic is 'tolerance,' all standards disappear," the organization said. "It is not we who are imposing our values on all, but rather it is those who are protesting us this week who would impose a strange and dangerous new ethic on the entire nation."

Howard Reisner, a gay demonstrator, said he hoped the hour-long demonstration would show that gays are just like everyone else.

"We're all family," he said. "We're all related. The family unit is not a man, woman, 2.5 children and a dog. The family unit is love. Without love, there is no family unit."

Protest organizer Franklin Whitworth of Ground Zero, a Colorado Springs advocacy group, said what was planned as a three-day series of events has evolved into a weeklong protest.

Mel White, a gay minister, started the protest Monday with a fast to call attention to what he calls "myths" about homosexuality being perpetuated by Focus and its leader, Dr. James Dobson.

"We're not here to say terrible things about Focus," White told the crowd Saturday. "We're here to say gays, lesbians, transsexuals are welcome in this state. We're not forgetting all the good you (Focus) do. But at the same time, you're misinformed."

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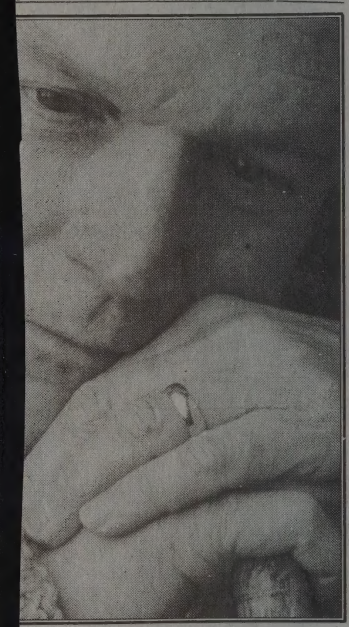
If Witty were managing a private corporation's retirement fund, he would be prevented from doing such consulting work by federal law.

But Witty's arrangement apparently doesn't violate that or other federal laws because the El Paso County fund is for public employees only.

"We would like to know where the loyalty of the administrator lies," said one pension fund investment consultant who asked not to be named. "Is it with the fund or is it with the investment he represents?"



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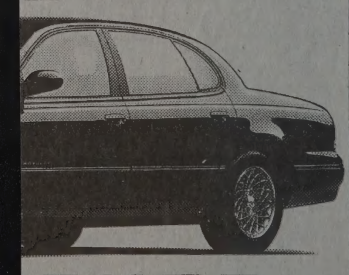

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